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# From the Guest Thematic Editor: True Interdisciplinarity

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It has been a pleasure to serve as guest thematic editor of *Diálogo* 16. The timing was just right. Latino Studies and Latino/a Theology have not always walked on the same path. This collaboration brings together two dynamic centers of scholarly productivity at DePaul: the Center for Latino Research, and the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, both in the College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences. Both entities are committed to interdisciplinary research that fosters greater solidarity and understanding between North America and Latin America as well as to the themes of immigration and transnationalism. But the truly novel part of the collaboration was to engage Latino/a reality in the U.S. from dual perspectives. I sincerely hope the exchange, in these *Diálogo* pages, can contribute to broader methodological discussions of how these two disciplines complement each other.

This issue brings together a fascinating collection of insights into Latino/a aesthetics and the history of the Mexican presence in Chicago. We invited contributions that explore the current state of Latino/a Catholicism in the U.S., and current and historical struggles to achieve transformations in Latino/a Catholicism. I myself was particularly interested in ways in which Latino/a Catholicism integrates a vision of beauty and justice and thus articulates a new and compelling view of nature, culture, art, and social change. We offer a glimpse of the history and contemporary lived experience of Latino/a Religious Communities in Chicago by focusing on the diary of a Mexican woman from the time of early migration, and an article that studies The Resurrection Project in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago.

The collaboration was fruitful beyond my expectations. It is easy to talk about broad and noble ideals like “interdisciplinarity” but we actually produced an interdisciplinary issue. Now that is exciting!

We chose the theme of: “Cosmic Liturgy: Latino/a Catholicism Today.” The term “cosmic liturgy” comes from a distant but interesting source. A highly regarded Swiss Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, first used it in 1941 to summarize the achievement of

a groundbreaking thinker from the seventh century (Maximus the Confessor) whose synthetic understanding of life and liturgy brought together a vast expanse of the wisdom of Asia and the Christian East into a single vision.<sup>1</sup> Under the same thematic title, a second issue of *Diálogo* 16 will describe the work of Alejandro García-Rivera, a Cuban American theologian (and former nuclear physicist) who died on December 13, 2010 and was indebted in some ways to von Balthasar and especially to his search for a new vision of cosmic synthesis in the world today.

In context of this journal, however, the meaning of cosmic liturgy has a very broad, multivalent meaning. For Latinas and Latinos the study of faith and culture always lies at the crossroads. Alex García-Rivera talked about the Latino/a theology as a fusion of the indigenous cosmivision with the Christian view of the world as the garden of God. Alex highlighted the woundedness of the artist that comes from standing in solidarity with the marginalized. All of the symbols in religion and rituals of daily life reflect these multiple sources of identity and meaning as well as the struggle to articulate their integration in a novel way.

Volume 16, Number 2 will focus on the theological aesthetics of Latino/a Catholicism. This thematic focus grows out of a conference held in the Fall of 2011 at DePaul University entitled, “Cosmic Liturgy: The Vision of Alejandro García-Rivera.” We gathered then to celebrate Alex’s legacy and mourn his passing. Alex died young, and his departure was both sad and sudden. The collection of short essays in that issue, revised from presentations given at that conference, will be a fitting memorial to the still undiscovered legacy of this remarkable man, and will be joined by complementary articles from scholars in Latin American and Latino Studies.

These two issues are just the beginning; evidence of *diálogo* in process of discovering a new path, *un camino*. In his last publication before he died, Alex García-Rivera wrote about the eschewal of utopian gardens, the both oppressive and homogenizing American Eden and the eternal quest to return to the mythical pre-lapsarian home of Adam and Eve. He wrote:

Gardens, after all, have a natural integrity that human cultural activity must respect. Gardens require a tender reciprocal engagement between the natural and the cultural. In other words, gardens are meant to be “lived-with,” not merely “lived-in.”<sup>2</sup>

In preparing these two issues we are living with the tragic struggles and wondrous newness of Latino Catholicism. The engagement has been hi-tech and arduously slow at the same time, demanding *Sitzfleisch* and inner patience. In that sense, we have tended to our garden, and as a result the collaboration has been beautiful and luminous.

As *Diálogo* Editor Elizabeth Martínez remarks, we are reminded that the much ballyhooed end of the Mayan calendar is an opportune time to think with sober and curious eyes about the complexity of the Latino/a presence in our midst. I concur. I too write with a palpable sense of *kairos*, of anticipating the right moment and a new discovery. In fact, as I began these remarks on December 12, 2012, a moment not in fear of apocalypse but instead the middle of the Catholic season of Advent and precise date of the feast of *La Morenita*, the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Among the many sites for this celebration in the Midwest is “the second Tepeyac of North America” in Des Plaines, IL.<sup>3</sup> This designation was affirmed by the Cardinal Archbishop of Mexico City in 2001, and is a palpable reality to the throngs who have visited it since 2001. The sheer size of the devotion lends weight to the cultural imprint. It is reported that 200,000 pilgrims make the trek to the Chicago suburb during the celebration each year.<sup>4</sup> Is there a more massive religious gathering anywhere in North America? But even more remarkable, as Elaine Peña notes, is the curious confluence of time and space. The original site, *La villa*, is revered as the place where *La Morenita* appeared to the indigenous St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin. It is a furnace for the nurturing of national and religious identity. No apparition, however, is associated with the site in Des Plaines. It is a constructed, transnational sacred space, utilizing Chicago engineering and fundraising and the gumption of local Mexican clergy and faithful. There is nothing transient about Maryville outside of Chicago for the worshipping faithful, for the Aztec dancers who perform there, or even for the curious DePaul students who accompanied me there last year on a class trip.

The story of the two Tepeyacs is illustrative of what we are trying to accomplish with these two issues. Both sites are socially and ecclesiastically constructed realities even though I do not share doubts about the religious legitimacy of either one. For the pilgrims forging their path in Northern Illinois, they are indissolubly linked. Without using the word “transnational,” the ethos is plainly that. Faith, politics, history, culture and identity converge in a unique and surprising way on the way to the site in the Midwest. If we can bring more sustained attention to the myriad sites of such convergence in our very midst, then these two issues will not have been in vain.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The English translation is based upon a subsequent revision: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).
- 2 Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Garden of God: A Theological Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 129.
- 3 Cf. Elaine Peña, *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred With the Virgin of Guadalupe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 3.
- 4 As reported by journalist Rocco Palmo in “Whispers in the Loggia,” on Dec. 12, 2009. See <<http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/2009/12/in-chitown-la-morenita-as-mother-lode.html>> (accessed online on January 5, 2013).